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ABSTRACT

This paper finds that most authorities advocate educational models which include all the population and which try to be both diversified in accepting wide cultural differences and inexpensive in achieving results quickly. In many cases these objectives have been found to be incompatible. However, the author feels that new media may now be so effective that costs are reduced and results may be achieved quickly, while at the same time reducing one-way communications between cultures. Through the application of media smaller societies would be able to safeguard their traditions, despite scattered populations or political frontiers. This analysis, the author feels, leads to achieving better communications for cultural minorities. (FDI)

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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND ALTERNATIVES FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Most authorities advocate educational models which include all the population, sometimes diversified to accept cultural differences, but likely to be achieved cheaply and quickly. In several respects these objectives are incompatible. However, new media may now be so effective that costs are reduced and results achieved quickly. Although the emphasis has so far remained upon traditional skill related objectives, it now may be possible to reduce condescending one-way communications between cultures. Smaller societies would be able to safeguard their traditions, despite scattered populations or political frontiers. The analysis leads to a scenario for achieving better communications for cultural minorities.

THE MIRAGE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL MODELS.

It is readily acknowledged that a large part of the world's population is educationally, politically and economically disadvantaged. Increasingly they know and resent it. The prospect of meeting their various expectations provides a frustrating mirage for educational development, particularly when international difficulties are examined.

A review of objectives reveals that universal primary and very general secondary education should be achieved everywhere, national and regional aspirations should be satisfied, and local tratitions should be respected. All of these goals

will be achieved within a few years, without imposing intolerable burdens upon society.[1]

The cynicism voiced by responsible and increasingly influential scholars[2] seems to be demonstrated in even comparatively wealthy countries. Sufficient resources are not being made available. The priority of education has often been reduced.

The difficulties of extending the existing educational models to all parts of the world have been well established.[3] Sufficient resources do not appear to be available for the near future. The compromises appear to be (assuming little change in demographic patterns) that education can remain elitist; economics of scale can be pursued; institutional schooling can give way to diversified learning; the media can be harnessed. Myrdal concludes that education at present is usually not effective at producing social and economic change in the poorest countries,[4] i.e. that elitism is the usual practice.

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1. These objectives were eloquently proclaimed and strategies to realize them were outlined by UNESCO during International Education Year (1970).

2. Everett Reimer, School is Dead: Alternatives in Education, Toronto, Doubleday, 1971, Ch. I.

3. Philip H. Coombs, The World Educational Crisis: A Systems Analysis, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1968, pp. 51-52.

4. Gunnar Myrdal, The Challenge of World Poverty, New York, Random House, 1970, p. 402.

For the most part, objectives have stressed economy, applicability and cultural fidelity. Economy has usually been viewed as an input variable, - 'what can we afford this year?' despite the evidence that after appropriate intervals the outputs can be quantified. Applicability includes most attempts to measure the quality of the educational experience, for example its ability to reduce unemployment, to boost productivity or to secure other desired outcomes.[5] Cultural fidelity has received less attention in policy making,[6] somewhat surprisingly because of the bitterness usually associated with contests between value positions. Thomas Green suggests that justice in policy making will never be a viable argument for promoting equal educational opportunity.[7] Until very recently, most analysts suggested that an absorption process or homogenization was expected, and that the outcome would be a highly

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5. The principal economic arguments of the first two kinds (affordability and appliability) are well reviewed by C. Arnold Anderson and Mary Jean Bowman "Theoretical Considerations" in George Z.F. Bereday and Joseph A. Lauwerys (eds.) The World Yearbook of Education, 1967, Educational Planning, London, Evans Brothers, 1967, Ch. 1.

6. The economic consequences of ignoring the cultural aspirations of particular groups can be found in most countries. In the Ukraine the attempt to impose Russian during the period 1897-1917 was a waste of resources. Jaan Pennar, Ivan I. Bakalo and George Z.F. Bereday Modernization and Diversity in Soviet Education With Special Reference to Nationality Groups, New York, Praeger, 1971, pp. 215-216.

7. Thomas F. Green, "The Dismal Future of Equal Educational Opportunity", in Thomas F. Green (ed.) Educational Planning in Perspective, Guilford, Surrey, Futures/IPC Science and Technology Press, 1971, pp. 24-39.

industrialized global civilization.[8]

Dissenters were regarded as impractical romantics grasping at a dying culture. For example, North American Indians or Eskimos are expected eventually to take their full and rightful place on the assembly line and to be eager consumers of cosmetics, TV dinners and wide track tires. Their hesitation about embracing this advanced life style would soon disappear.[9]

The plaintiffs are usually more concerned with the loss of their cultural identity than with material things or even some of the advantages likely to accompany cultural synthesis.[10]

However, highly industrialized societies have produced some internal opposition to the single-minded pursuit of materialistic goals. The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Environment is a conscientious examination of the alternatives at one level. At another, there is a widespread search for new life styles appropriate to technologies, or escapes from them.

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8. In the United States, an artistic interpretation was the process widely accepted but still mistaken. It was derived from a play: Israel Zangwill, The Melting Pot, (New York, MacMillan, 1909). Marshall McLuhan even forecasts global synthesis. Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, The Medium is the Massage, An Inventory of Effects, Toronto, Bantam, 1967, p. 63.

9. Jack Ferguson "Social Change in the Western Arctic", in W.E. Mann (ed) Social and Cultural Change in Canada, Vol.1, Toronto, Copp Clark, 1970, pp. 27-50.

10. Harold Cardinal, The Unjust Society, Edmonton, Hurtig, 1969, pp. 10-15.

But for many parts of the world, the choices are severely restricted. Prizing their distinctive cultural heritage may not prevent educated people from compromising it to seek metropolitan opportunities.[11] They know that one or two generations usually extinguish almost all the loyalties to the past so most of the anguish will be borne by one generation.

Of course, relatively few persons have this option. On a larger scale, few societies have a choice giving more than a few years respite. A possible exception may be that the survival of Indian and Eskimo cultures in Canada depends less upon resources than the ability of Canadians to respect diversity.

A similar decision faced by a small independent nation, seeking to maintain its heritage (but not located astride a gold mine) would be much more difficult. In the short run idealism could be indulged. But in time the consequences of stemming conventional 'modernization' would probably consign the government to both heavy domestic pressure and the likelihood of eventual domination by some industrial power.[12] Rapid changes, including some form of mass education,

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11. Modernization and the Migration of Talent, New York, Education and World Affairs, 1970, pp. 46-48.

12. William G. Demas, The Economics of Development in Small Countries with Special Reference to the Caribbean, Montreal, McGill, 1965, p. 61.

appear to be both handmaidens of development and foundations for independence. At best, it may be possible to disengage economic and industrial progress from some of the cultural accouterments so arrogantly displayed by metropolitan nations.[13]

Although conventional approaches had brought mass education quickly and cheaply to such heterogeneous societies as the Soviet Union, they do not appear to be adequate for the task ahead. They rely too much upon standardization to secure rapid extension of economic services. A uniform curriculum, uniform texts and examinations enable ill-trained teachers to be used initially. When cultural groups demanding separate treatment become too small and numerous, the costs mount quickly.

In addition, the schools explosion of the Soviet Union preceded the quantum leap in scientific and technological information. Closing the knowledge gap has become correspondingly harder. New techniques to promote efficient learning have boosted the costs of typical education since the heady years of Soviet expansion.

The problem of costs is particularly frustrating for many small societies. Not only do they lack the resources available to Makarenko and his fellows, but they often are divided by political frontiers. Despite the difficulties,

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13. This phenomenon is readily observed in societies combining size and intense devotion to a culture, such as Japan, Thailand, or even Israel. However various elements may disrupt the process even there. Several case studies are included in George D. Spindler Education and Culture, Toronto, Holt Rinehart, 1963, Part III, 'Education Viewed Cross-Culturally'.

they have not long to ponder their options. The impact of modern technology upon previously isolated cultures has been persuasive and pervasive. For example, the most isolated parts of the planet are now accessible to the transistor, augmented by microwave and satellite. Radio and television are among the most powerful harbingers of development. But international currency (even the Money Card) and the internal combustion education are equally relentless.

These new engines of influence have already been harnessed for mass education.[14] Cinema, radio, and television can be used with illiterate audiences. The visual approach can even surmount the barriers of language. In consequence, education has gained powerful new tools for disseminating information and large populations can be brought more effectively under control.

For the most part the information has been flowing only one way. The scattered cultural groups have learned to adapt to the expectations of a larger world. The value of their traditional livelihoods and ceremonies may be translated into spectator attractions, with tourist income replacing the cultural roots that gave them meaning. For example, when Thailand's northern tribal children must pose for tourist photographs for 'one bhat' there is not much time

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14. Recent UNESCO monographs on electronic mass communication include 60-Broadcasting from Space (1970) 59-Mass Media in Society (1970), 53 Communications Satellites for Education, Science and Culture (1967), Paris, UNESCO.

left for the revitalization or preservation of the remnants of their tribal heritage. The problem is compounded by the depleted numbers within many tribes, as various pressures exact their toll.

Scenario for a Culture Based Exchange

Recent indications provide some hope that the cultural imperialism may be ending. Pluralist societies have received more theoretical attention, and technical advances make possible a real exchange of information. This can be expected to grow, but it can be less centralized and more flexible than previous information systems. In effect, the one-way spread of idea will be augmented by counter and cross flaws. Individuals within cultural minorities will communicate without the traditional 'middleman' educator.

Attitudes now favour this type of information exchange. The disenchantment with industrial values, the alarm at the prospect of lost or frozen cultures, the loosening of loyalties to particular human organizations, all seem to augur well. But what previous seeers could only hope for now has the prospect of reality.

There are now means of exchanging oral and visual ideas without the need of writing or translation into other languages. The hardware is available and relatively cheap to buy. Cassettes or tapes are reusable. The machinery can be operated without elaborate training. In consequence, one principal raison d'être for uniform education -- the communications argument -- can now be reappraised.

Canadian examples show the possibilities. Eskimos exchange cassettes in preference to letters because they can thereby express their sentiments more faithfully. Local radio broadcasting in the North provides information in the vernacular to groups numbered only in hundreds, despite the usual problem of finance. This operation usually depends upon ham operators or government agencies, justified as a service, not by commercial arguments.

These communications between members of the same culture maintain a feeling of community despite the intervening distances. Coupled with superior transportation, it makes possible the survival of a culture despite dominant alien influences. A critical mass can be achieved, providing the security that hitherto lay only in isolation.

Because a viable minority community can now be relatively scattered without losing its identity, it will be possible for cultures to be restored, preserved, and developed to meet new conditions. The objective, of course, is that this will be self-directed, not imposed. Although a relatively inefficient means of devising social organizations suited to the future, this decentralization has a better prospect of producing something acceptable. Imposed plans, no matter how carefully developed, are more likely to be rejected.

Emphasis upon removing the constraints to communications within minority groups does not preclude the possibility and desirability of intercultural connections. The

impact upon minorities of the dominant group has been relentless. It will continue, but a counter-flow of information and ideas is now possible. The most likely influences may be the arts and leisure activities, areas comparatively neglected in many industrial societies until recently. Recent publications and movies such as The Unjust Society, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, Little Big Man have demonstrated that a mass audience can be attracted by works which achieve greater cultural fidelity. Old stereotypes will not suffice.

Minorities in other parts of the world often face quite different problems. Very often resources, both material and human, are severely limited. The possibility of establishing a widespread two-way communications network may be remote. However, radio is already being used to circulate information. If a greater part of the programming were controlled by representatives of the minority cultures, they could attempt to shore the erosion of their cultural values.

In many instances, political boundaries obtrude. Although no barrier to radio communication, there are resultant problems of finance and control. International control, perhaps through the regional office of UNESCO, has already been proposed. This would provide sufficient economy of scale to justify widespread adult education or school broadcasts. An eloquent plea by Mrs. Silvina C. Laya, Manilla, urged Asian nations to establish such a network for themselves, under the aegis of UNESCO.

Present indications are that the type of information network described could be established for minorities in most parts of the world. On a cost-effectiveness basis it is probably justified for these purposes, mainly because of the inefficiency created by resentment to traditional approaches. Failing to establish effective universal education would lead to cultural extinction, bitter prejudice occasioned by the failure of communication and effective utilization of human resources. The problems of intercultural education remain as a supreme challenge, but the difficulties of literacy first may now be removed by the imaginative use of technology.

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